1-1-2015

# Dialogic Constructions of Monogamy: The Discursive Struggles of Mono-Normativity and Mono-Realism

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# Dialogic Constructions of Monogamy:

# The Discursive Struggles of Mono-Normativity and Mono-Realism

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

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June 2015

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Title: Dialogic Constructions of Monogamy: The Discursive Struggles of Mono-Normativity and Mono-Realism
Advisor: Dr. Elizabeth Suter
Degree Date: June 2015

ABSTRACT

Through the lens of relational dialectics theory (RDT; Baxter, 2011), this study examines the various discourses of monogamy and works to understand how monogamy is granted power through communication. Data for the study was gathered via qualitative surveys. A contrapuntal analysis identified two competing discourses: (1) the discourse of mono-normativity and (2) the discourse of mono-realism. The discourse of mono-normativity is taken for granted as the ordinary way to conduct romantic relationships. As such, it is granted power and idealized. The discourse of mono-realism disrupts the discourse of mono-normativity, as it challenges the idealization of monogamous romantic relationships. The discourses were fraught with discursive struggle; however, they also combined to create a new way of animating the meaning of monogamy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank my Advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Suter and the hours that she spent meeting with me and reading drafts. Her attentiveness and humor pushed me to produce a work that I had never imagined. I am so grateful for her guidance and presence as I continue to pursue academia. I would like to express gratitude for my committee members, Dr. Erin Willer and Dr. Eleanor McNees. I am grateful for the support of my peers, specifically Leah Seurer, who answered many questions and aided in the validity of my work, and Phil Lindeman and Christin Brandow who spent time editing this piece. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Ryan Trificana, who has supported my pursuit of academics and continues to engage in thoughtful dialogue with me daily.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Monogamy is the foundation for heteronormative romantic relationships in the United States. The contemporary institution of marriage assumes a monogamous bond between partners (Abbott, 2011; Treas & Giesen, 2000), and monogamous marriage is the only form of marriage that is recognized legally in the United States (Abbott, 2011). Even in same-sex marriages the underlying expectation is monogamy (Abbott, 2011). Anderson (2012) posits that monogamy maintains a privileged social position—what he calls *monogamism*—and suggests that there is a cultural unwillingness to question or critique monogamy. The result is ubiquitous acceptance of monogamy in romantic relationships and an idealized conflation that monogamy is the only acceptable way to engage in romantic relationships (Anderson, 2012).

Despite the fact that the idea of monogamy is widely accepted and left unquestioned, the actual enactment of monogamous romantic relationships is in crisis. Reports of extramarital affairs are high: In 41% of marriages, either one or both spouses admit to either physical or emotional infidelity ("Infidelity Statistics," 2015). Additionally, 57% of men and 54% of women report infidelity in any monogamous relationship in which they have engaged ("Infidelity Statistics"). Buss (1994) notes that statistics on extramarital affairs are conservative estimates due to the stigmatization and risk of disclosing such information. Additionally, more than 20% of marriages are sexless (sex occurring less than four times a year), and the current divorce rate hovers

around 50% (Brandon, 2010). As a result, the emerging adult population—individuals aged eighteen to mid-twenties—see romantic relationships that lead to marriage as perils to be avoided, or at least delayed (Arnett, 2014).

Given the rupture, the purpose of this study is to examine the various discourses of monogamy and understand how monogamy is granted power through communication. The goal will be achieved by employing relational dialectics theory (RDT; Baxter, 2006, 2011). RDT was strategically chosen because it both allows for the identification of discourses and examines how power is located through communication (Baxter, 2011). The central analytic focus of RDT is to explain how meaning is made through the discursive struggles of competing worldviews, or *discourses* (Baxter, 2010, 2011). In the following section, an overview of monogamy and a review of RDT are provided, illuminating how monogamy is understood through the perception of emerging adults and how the theoretical framework addresses power.

## Monogamy: A Modern Perspective

Before the eighteenth century, sexual exclusivity was not expected in marital relationships globally. Instead, through most of history, marriage functioned as a political and economic transaction, allowing families to accumulate wealth, establish political alliances, and create strategic partnerships through marrying off sons and daughters (Coontz, 2005). Beginning in Victorian society, the institution of marriage changed, and the expectation for monogamy evolved: a social definition of monogamy was instituted for women but not men (Smith, 2005, p. 49). Engles (1972) recognized a fundamental hypocrisy in monogamy as part of the marital contract. Wives were expected to be monogamous because it ensured the paternity of children within the

marriage, and wealth could then be passed down through the bloodline (Gordon, 2002). Husbands, on the other hand, did not have the same biological obligations of ensuring their parentage, so they were allowed the freedom to have sexual relationships with prostitutes (for an overview of research regarding the politics of women's sexual rights, see Gordon, 2002). The resulting culture encouraged chaste women who protected the family and its subsequent wealth lineage.

The Victorian perception of romantic relationships was passed to the United States between the mid-eighteenth and mid-twentieth century. However, a marriage ideal based on lifelong monogamy and intimacy in "love-based male breadwinner" relationships was punctuated by inequality between the sexes (Coontz, 2005, p. 11). The inequality manifested in divided gender roles and a continued social definition of monogamy, wherein women were expected to remain faithful while men could seek sexual relationships outside of the marriage (Smith, 2005). In the 1970s, when the fight for gender equality entered into relationships, rather than open the doors for sexual liberation, monogamy was still the expectation for both sexes (Oppenheimer, 2011). In this model, monogamous marriage is expected to meet psychological and social needs for the individuals in the couple, granting equity to each of the relational partners (Coontz, 2005).

Currently, there are two overarching definitions of monogamy in sociology and psychology literature. The first definition of monogamy is broad, specifically linking it to marriage: "The practice or state of being married to one person at a time," (Overall, 1998, p. 2). This broad definition leaves out the implications of values and behaviors in monogamous relationships. It assumes that monogamy is inherently a marital structure,

and that simply the act of engaging in one marriage at a time insinuates monogamy. When the definition of monogamy is removed from value statements, the enactment of monogamy is clear. However, the secondary understanding of modern monogamy is more complex.

Other scholars have posited monogamy as having sexual interactions with only one other person during a given amount of time in either a dating or marital relationship (Anderson, 2012; Barash & Lipton, 2001; Overall, 1998). This definition of monogamy in romantic relationships is taken for granted as normal and identified as "healthy, proper, moral, and natural" (Anderson, 2012, p. 84). It is positioned as a more applicable definition of monogamy than the Overall's definition because an individual does not have to be married to engage in a monogamous romantic relationship. As a result of its taken-for-granted status, monogamy is seen as underpinning the highest form of love—sex with outsiders diminishes the existence of love between individuals in a dyad (Anderson, 2012; Duck, 2011).

Due to the aforementioned qualities that characterize idealized monogamy in Western society, monogamy has a cultural privilege that protects it from scrutiny: the power of hegemony. Anderson credits Gramsci (1971) for his initial writing on political hegemonic theory as it related to power over the working class. Gramsci claimed that the bourgeoisie cultivated hegemony by gaining the support of the masses; thus, constructs like monogamy flourish and become normative values because they are based on the consensus that they benefit all. Anderson situates monogamy as the social power structure that gained dominance by the masses and is perpetuated by the masses because it has been sold as the natural state for romantic relationships. Lukacs (1971) refers to

this phenomenon as the discursive practice of reification. Through reification, monogamy is established as the correct way to conduct romantic relationships, so it is not questioned. Because it is not questioned, it is asserted as moral and right. Over time, monogamy becomes the hegemonic standard of relational behavior.

Monogamy is idealized and romanticized as the moral and natural state for romantic relationships. However, emerging adults are not engaging in romantic relationships like previous generations, nor do they enact either of the strict definitions of monogamy that have been provided (Arnett, 2014). For example, they are seeking experience through varied romantic partners, often engaging in serial monogamy (dating one person, breaking up and moving to another person) (Arnett, 2014). Interestingly, members of the emerging adult population believe that their behavior is indeed monogamous, and 90% intend to eventually marry (Anderson, 2012). Their understanding of monogamy has the potential to be impacted by their relationships with religion, as emerging adults have diverse religions beliefs: 22% agnostic/atheist, 28% diest, 27% liberal believer, and 23% conservative believer (Arnett, 2014). The emerging adult population lives within the rupture of the perceived ideal and the actual enactment of monogamy, as nearly half of U.S. children have divorced parents and divorce is one of the most enduring family influences on children (Arnett, 2014). As products of divorced parents, emerging adults have a practical understanding of the implications of monogamy and can recognize when monogamy fails in marital relationships. This understanding informs their intention to delay marriage and the implied "settling down" until they have more life experience (Arnett, 2014).

Finally, it is important to note that emerging adults have largely been studied using White, middle-class populations, reflecting a very specific worldview (Arnett, 2014). The emerging adult perspective, then, is entangled in the power and privilege of whiteness as it is positioned in the United States. Specifically, Rasmussen, Nexica, Klinenberg, and Wray (2001) provide an overview of the ideology of whiteness and the numerous advantages that come with simply being White. As such, whiteness is a specific lens through which to view monogamy and the power dynamics of monogamous romantic relationships. In an effort to maintain consistency with the previous research on emerging adults, this study focused on White, middle-class college students. Aside from simply maintaining consistency, there is an interest in discovering how a dominant perspective navigates a discursive rupture. The resulting study examines how White, middle-class college students who function within race and class privilege discursively navigate monogamy.

Relational dialectics theory is the foundation for this explanation, as it takes into consideration how power influences cultural discourses. As a dialogic theory, RDT specifically focuses on how communicative acts shape worldviews. Additionally, it allows for an interplay analysis—or an examination of how discourses compete for power through language. By identifying the discourses of monogamy and understanding how the subsequent discourses struggle for dominance, monogamy's power dynamics will be understood through the lenses of both discursive performance and the privileged identities that voice discourses. The next section will provide an in-depth understanding of RDT, as well as situate the research questions for this study.

# CHAPTER TWO:

# RELATIONAL DIALECTICS THEORY AND STATEMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RDT is a dialogic theory based on concepts of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism (Holquist, 2002). From a dialogic perspective, discourses are voiced through utterance chains (Baxter, 2011). An individual utterance is not an isolated communicative event; rather, it can be understood as a site on an utterance chain where previously uttered discourses converge and interplay with anticipated utterances (Baxter, 2011). As a function of RDT, it is important to locate where on the utterance chain an utterance falls, a process known as *unfolding* (Baxter, 2011). To unfold an utterance is to figure out the larger conversation surrounding it. Asking questions like, "What prior utterances might this utterance be a response to?" and "What responses it is encouraging?" can identify this larger conversation (Baxter, 2011, p. 161).

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) posed four utterance links that can situate utterances on the utterance chain: distal already-spokens, distal not-yet-spokens, proximal already-spokens, and proximal not-yet-spokens. The already-spokens include utterances that have previously been uttered, whereas the not-yet-spokens are anticipated utterances (Baxter, 2011). The distal already-spoken site in the utterance chain evokes utterances that are already developed and circulating in a culture, allowing meaning to be made based on previous understandings of a discourse. The distal not-yet-spoken site on the

utterance chain is where a speaker voices an utterance in anticipation of how a listener will perceive the meaning. In the distal, the listener is not a concrete individual, but rather a cultural personification who evaluates the normative nature of the utterance. This cultural personification is referred to as the superaddressee (Baxter, 2011).

Different from the distal, the proximal is where the relationship between the speaker and the listener is foregrounded. The proximal already-spoken site is where a relationship's historical meaning intersects with the relationship in the present. The speaker and the listener use this site to move the relationship to a new state. The proximal not-yet-spoken is similar in that it regards the relationship between the speaker and the listener. This site anticipates how a specific person, or listener, will react (Baxter, 2011).

In this study, the distal already-spoken and the distal not-yet-spoken are emphasized. By engaging the emerging adult population in an online survey and asking specific questions regarding the cultural understanding of monogamy, the distal already-spoken—or the discourses that are already circulating—will be exposed. Additionally, in the survey setting, the participant will not be speaking directly to an individual; rather, he or she will be answering to the superaddressee, who serves as a cultural figurehead. Removing the interaction with a real person and allowing participants to engage in communication online allows for a focus on the distal site.

The discourses that result from the surveys will ultimately illuminate the role of power in communication. Simply put, power resides in discourse (Baxter, 2011). Certain discourses are more powerful because they are normative, or centered as valuable. The discourses that are not centered are marginalized because they deviate

from the normative, valued perceptions. Centered discourses—also called centripetal discourses—compete with marginalized, or centrifugal discourses, for power (Baxter, 2011). Here, when an individual voices a discourse, the discourse is not conflated with the inner feelings of the speaker; rather, the utterance functions to discursively make meaning within the context of the utterance chain.

Considering the focus on the distals (already-spoken and not-yet-spoken) from the survey results, power will be considered at the cultural level rather than the personal level that would result from examining the proximal site of the utterance chain. First, the discourses that animate the meaning of monogamy need to be identified. In identifying these discourses, the ways in which they compete will be examined. As such, the first research question is posed:

RQ1: What are the competing discourses that animate the meaning of *monogamy*?

**Interplay in the Discourses of Monogamy**

While identifying the competing discourses of monogamy is significant, the interplay of the competing discourses and how meaning is made through competition is also of interest. Power struggles can be seen through diachronic separation, synchronic interplay, and transformation (Baxter, 2011). Diachronic separation occurs when only a single discourse asserts its dominant meaning, but there is a change in dominance over time (Baxter, 2011). There are two types of diachronic separation. First, spiraling inversion is where power is asserted in a back-and-forth pattern over time. For example, in romantic relationships, individuals might center independence at a given point in time (like the beginning of the relationship), and then later shift to center connection (when individuals move in together) (Baxter, 2011). Segmentation also alternates a dominant,

powerful discourse, but the discourses are varied in segregated domains. Both domains cannot hold power at the same time, so as one domain gains power, the discourses within that domain gain dominance as well. An example of segmentation is when a couple centers independence in a specific setting, but connectedness in other locations: independence might be normalized when attending an activity with friends, but connectedness is expected at home.

Synchronic interplay occurs when different discourses can be found within the same utterance, which results in negating, countering, and entertaining (Baxter, 2011). Negating is when an individual denies one discourse its legitimacy while empowering a different discourse. The denial is accomplished when the speaker calls forth the discourse only to discredit it. For example, an individual might call forth the discourse of an open relationship (a committed romantic relationship that has rules and expectations the individuals in the relationship follow), but state that open relationships defile the traditional family structure and subsequent health of children (Jamieson, 2004). Ultimately, open relationships are negated because they can impact the family negatively and harm children.

When a speaker counters, the individual establishes a discursive preference, yet allows the competing discourse to have some valid qualities. An example of countering is stating that an open relationship may work for some, yet being in an open relationship would not work for everyone. This example typifies countering because the preference for monogamy is clearly established while also implying there is a place for those who choose open relationships.

Finally, entertaining does not imply a discursive preference, but rather describes a balanced understanding of the discourses. An example of entertaining would be an individual who validates both monogamy and open relationships, as long as no one is being lied to or hurt. By acknowledging each relational orientation, no discourse is preferred—thus, entertaining occurs.

Both diachronic separation and synchronic interplay address how discourses embody power. Diachronic separation provides a lens through which to view discourses as powerful over time. Synchronic interplay shows the ways in which discourses are leveraged by language to exhibit power through negating, countering, and entertaining. In some instances, discourses are suspended as they engage in transformation. In transformative interplay, power is redefined, as discourses alter their original meaning in order to establish a new, different meaning.

There are two types of discursive transformation known as hybridization and aesthetic moments (Baxter, 2011). Hybridization occurs when two discourses come together to create an entirely new meaning and both discourses are no longer competing. Baxter and Braithwaite (2008) explain hybridization as salad dressing: when shaken, oil and vinegar create an entirely new substance. However, the distinctive parts—oil and vinegar—remain and even separate if left standing. For example, in Norwood's (2012) article on the grief family members feel when a child transitions genders, one hybrid occurred when a participant noted that he gained a daughter yet did not lose a son. The hybrid allowed the child to co-exist in both gendered spaces, and the parent did not grieve the loss of the son because the son was still available in memories. Ultimately, the

discourses of loss and gain are still apparent, but the individual created a new way of understanding loss through access memories.

Whereas hybrids are like salad dressing, Baxter and Braithwaite (2008) describe aesthetic moments as chemical reactions, such as when oxygen and hydrogen come together to create water—discourses are no longer disparate in aesthetic moments because they have been transformed. Norwood (2012) noted an aesthetic moment when a participant separated gender from personhood in order to make sense of her parent's transition. By removing the discourses of sex and gender as they relate to personhood, the participant created an entirely new meaning when considering her family.

In order to explore how the discourses that animate monogamy interplay, the second research question is posed:

RQ2: How does the interplay of competing discourses construct the meaning of "monogamy"?

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

## Participants

The target population for the current study was emerging adults (Arnett, 2014), which are defined as individuals 18 years old through the twenties. There were 116 total respondents. The population was primarily female (*n* = 91, 83%), with the rest identifying as male (*n* = 19, 17%). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 26 years (*M* = 20.66, *SD* = 2.03), and described themselves as straight (*n* = 102, 93%), gay/lesbian (*n* = 1, 1%), bisexual (*n* = 6, 5%), or pansexual (attraction to people rather than gender identities) (n = 1, 1%). They were primarily White (*n* = 87, 79%), Hispanic/Latino (*n* = 7, 6%), Black/African American (*n* = 5, 5%), American Indian (*n* = 2, 2%), Asian (*n* = 2, 2%), and Other (*n* = 7, 6%).

Participants reported that they were in a monogamous relationship (*n* = 46, 45%), open relationship (*n* = 1, 1%), not engaged in a romantic relationship (*n* = 49, 48%), or other (*n* = 7, 7%). Those who listed themselves as being in "other" relational types were given the opportunity to describe their relationship. The descriptions ranged from "Confused!" to various stages of transitioning due to long-distance relationships fostered by attending different schools.

## Data Collection

Participants were recruited after study approval of the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Nineteen instructors of communication courses were approached

via email for approval to recruit from their classes. The primary researcher visited each class to provide a description of the study and a link to the survey. Each instructor was also provided with an email script to send to students as a reminder of the opportunity, as well as to include an electronic link (see Appendix A).

Data was collected in an online survey via Qualtrics for the sake of anonymity. The survey included a brief set of instructions for the participants, operationalized terms, qualitative survey questions, and demographic data (for the full survey, see Appendix B). There were six questions in the survey that worked to elicit utterances on the discourse of monogamy. The first series of questions focused on challenges in monogamous relationships: If you *have* been involved in a monogamous relationship, what do you find challenging about monogamy? If you *have never* been in a monogamous relationship, what do you think are some challenges in monogamous relationships? What are some of the difficulties you have seen friends or family members face with monogamy? The survey then moved to the question, "How did you personally decide to be monogamous?" This question intentionally assumed monogamy based on the target population, and it was meant to encourage critical thinking on how individuals make the choice to be monogamous—if they actually make a choice at all. The last two questions were hypothetical scenarios where participants were asked about how they would react to their partner admitting attraction to someone else, as well as how they would react to a potential romantic relationship. The scenarios provoked the participants by implicating hypothetical relational situations and asking them how they would react. This elicitation of the distal site on the utterance chain proved to make sense of how monogamy functions in romantic relationships. The demographic questions included age, biological

sex, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. The next section will discuss the data analysis process.

In order to encourage participation, instructors offered their students extra credit for completing the survey. At the end of the survey, students were redirected to a different survey to document their participation and earn the extra credit. At the end of the term, each instructor was provided with a list of the students who earned the extra credit.

**Data Analysis**

The 116 responses were analyzed using contrapuntal analysis, which is a critical discourse analysis suitable for RDT research questions (Baxter, 2011). Analysis began by transferring the data from Qualtrics to word processing software. A thematic analysis ensued on the first half of the data (or the first 58 responses for each survey question) to identify cultural discourses apparent in the data based on the semantic object at hand: monogamy (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis included reading and re-reading the data in order to group significant ideas together. Once grouped, the themes were established as an idea that made sense of monogamy. The themes were then organized and named. Data exemplars were categorized according to the identified themes to help articulate how the themes were apparent in the utterances.

After the themes were clarified in the first half of the data, I compared my findings to the second half of the data set—a verification procedure known as referential adequacy, finding saturation at response 32 (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This step was accomplished by approaching the second half of the data set with an inquisitive eye to check for any themes that could be missing. A second verification procedure, constant

comparison, was employed to further the rigor of the analysis process. Constant comparison is a reiterative process, in which the researcher continuously checks the themes against the data and re-checks as new themes emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constant comparison occurred during the entire data analysis process. As I moved from one question to the next I examined the previous themes and assured that the themes were robust. This verification procedure allowed me to not only confirm the themes throughout the entire data set, but also ensured that the themes retained their applicability overall.

Once the themes were established, I grouped them to develop discourses. Discourses are a set of themes, which together unite to create an evaluative discursive position on the semantic object. The process of developing discourses occurred over a period of time. I started by asking the analytic question, "What is the meaning of monogamy?" I wrote down my ideas and then grouped the themes under each idea. I worked to understand monogamy through a macro lens, and consulted my advisor as I wrote up the meanings. During the write up process, I was able to hone my understanding of monogamy and how the ideas worked to establish a worldview of monogamy. Finally I consulted the literature and drew one of the discourse names—mono-normativity—from Pieper and Bauer (2005). Mono-normativity is the Western privileging of the couple, of sexual exclusivity, and of rules and assumptions that are taken-for-granted in romantic relationships. The second discourse, mono-realism, was coined by me to make sense of how individuals usurp the taken-for-granted understandings of monogamy. The discourses will me more fully developed in the next section, but it is important to have an operationalization to understand the process of

developing the discourses. Once I had the names, I was able to group the themes, and establish how the themes worked to inform the discourses. Similar to the thematic analysis, I also employed referential adequacy and constant comparison in the discourse analysis.

The next step was to conduct an interplay analysis. The interplay analysis began by identifying instances in the first half of the data set where the discourses interpenetrated through diachronic separation, synchronic interplay, and discursive transformation (Baxter, 2011). Unfolding helps with interplay analysis by asking questions to situate the discourses within the utterance chain. Questions such as, "What prior utterances might this utterance be a response to?" and "What responses are invited by this utterance?" (Baxter, 2011) were applied to the data set, and the answers worked to make meaning of the interplay. Referential adequacy was once again used to verify the findings by comparing results from the first half of the data set to the second half. After completing the interplay analysis for the first 58 responses of each question, I then worked through the second half of the data in order to affirm my findings and assure that I did not miss any pertinent information.

Undergoing a peer review and providing exemplars further confirmed validity. First, Leah Seurer, a peer well versed in relational dialectics theory and familiar with my work on monogamy, reviewed my themes, discourses, and interplay analysis (Suter, 2010). Then, she played devil's advocate with my interpretations in order to work through any contradicting analyses. She and I had two meetings, where I would outline my analysis and show her exemplars from my data. Then she would work to place the exemplars in the discourses to confirm that they made sense. Finally, I included the

exemplars my write-up as a final verification process. Exemplars provide readers with the opportunity to see the raw data and how it was analyzed, allowing for first-hand verification of the interpretations (Mishler, 1990).

# CHAPTER FOUR:

# DISCOURSE OF MONO-NORMATIVITY AND DISCOURSE OF MONO-REALISM

Research question one asked, "What are the discourses that animate the meaning of monogamy?" A contrapuntal analysis revealed two primary discourses based on emerging adults' understanding of monogamy: (1) the discourse of mono-normativity and (2) the discourse of mono-realism.

The first primary discourse of mono-normativity exemplifies the culturally dominant, distal already-spoken view of monogamy by normalizing coupled romantic relationships that are sexually and emotionally exclusive (Anderson, 2012). The following four tenets reify mono-normativity: (1) monogamy equals commitment (defined as sexual and emotional exclusivity), (2) "one true love" will meet all needs and desires, (3) monogamous relationships are moral, and (4) jealousy is normal in monogamous relationships. The discourse of mono-normativity is taken for granted as the ordinary way to conduct romantic relationships. As such, it is the idealized, powerful, centered discourse that is generally assumed when speaking about romantic relationships and partners. It does not allow for any other relational type except for monogamy, and it assumes that everyone engages in monogamous relationships.

The second primary discourse, the discourse of mono-realism, disrupts the idealized perspective of monogamous relationships and challenges the tenets of mono-normativity. The following four tenets illuminate the discourse of mono-realism: (1)

monogamous commitment is unreasonable, (2) many people can meet needs and desires, (3) monogamy is not human nature, and (4) jealousy inhibits relationships. Mono-realism situates monogamy as the culturally acceptable way to engage in romantic relationships; however, it departs from the discourse of mono-normativity in that it illustrates a more realistic interpretation of monogamy, rather than the idealized version. Furthermore, it problematizes the monogamous view and even works to make space for other relational types.

The discursive manifestations of the discourse of mono-normativity and the discourse of mono-realism are examined via their contrasting tenets, as outlined here: (1) the contention of monogamous commitment, (2) problematizing "one true love", (3) the moral dilemma of monogamy and human nature, and (4) the overt jealousy in monogamy.

**The Contention of Monogamous Commitment**

**Monogamy equals commitment (discourse of mono-normativity).** Through the discourse of mono-normativity, commitment is sexually and emotionally exclusive. This means that two people can only be committed to each other if they have sexual and emotional interactions only with each other. The discourse of mono-normativity also contends that monogamous romantic relationships are the only relationship type that is socially acceptable. Sexual and emotional exclusivity, then, become internalized as measurements of social acceptability and the subsequent success of monogamous romantic relationships. Essentially, having sexual or emotional relationships outside of the monogamous dyad is unacceptable and a reason for ending a romantic relationship. In some instances, if sexual and emotional exclusivity are not upheld, then the overall

relationship is stripped of its significance. Below, the discourse of mono-normativity, and the tenet that monogamy equals commitment, is exemplified:

> For me it was the desire for her to be mine and mine alone and for us to share each other exclusively. To love someone, I have to have their full commitment and leave no room for someone to enter the relationship. I absolutely need to have the relationship tied down or it would never be a relationship to me at all. (2130-2134)

The statement "mine and mine alone" epitomizes the exclusivity of monogamy. The point is bolstered by the words "share each other exclusively." By being unwilling to "share" the partner, the individual is noting a sense of ownership of the other partner. The statement, "it would never be a relationship to me at all," exceptionally highlights the significance of monogamy as a determinant of romantic relationships. Any relational form that deviates from the mono-normative is devalued so that the status of the romantic relationship is consequently reduced. The discourse of mono-normativity is centered in this utterance because it defines monogamy though the lens of owning a partner's sexual and emotional activity. The discourse also discounts relationships that deviate from its strict view of monogamous commitment.

Monogamy and commitment are viewed as one and the same in mono-normativity, while open relationships and commitment are seen as mutually exclusive. In response to the survey question asking participants if they would be willing to engage in an open relationship with someone in whom they have a romantic interest, one participant stated, "I would not engage in an open relationship with this person. When I am committed to someone, I want them to be committed to me also. I do not believe in open

relationships" (3252-3254). Monogamy is privileged in the discourse of mono-normativity because it equals commitment. As a result, open relationships cannot be committed relationships. Mono-normativity evolves into a belief system when the participant states, "I do not believe in open relationships." The conceptualization of "belief" heightens the importance of the discourse. With this declarative statement, the participant invokes the mono-normative worldview that monogamous relationships are the only relational type that are committed while at the same time implying that other relationship types are strictly not a relational option.

**Monogamous commitment is unreasonable (discourse of mono-realism).** The discourse of mono-realism positions monogamous commitment as unreasonable. While monogamous commitment is understood as the prevailing expectation for romantic relationships, this discourse creates a space to critique the idealized perception of sexual and emotional exclusivity. Participants who spoke to the idea that monogamous commitment is unreasonable pointed directly to the unrealistic expectations on relational partners in long-term relationships, specifically with regard to limitations on freedom and interacting with others outside the romantic couple. For example, one participant stated: "Sometimes it can be really hard just being with one person and not having the freedom to do what you want to do" (216-218). In this utterance, being in a monogamous romantic relationship limits the individual freedom of choice to do desired activities.

Specifically, the freedom of choice is limited when interacting with others in ways that can be perceived as romantic. In the discourse of mono-normativity, sexual and emotional exclusivity structure the limits of romantic relationships, and these limitations are perceived as the idealized, socially acceptable way to engage in

monogamous romantic relationships. The discourse of mono-realism, on the other hand, establishes that monogamous commitment is unreasonable, which can be seen in the following utterance:

> I hate how you have to restrict yourself around others when in a monogamous relationship. Flirting, dating, and other such activities are seen as cheating, when really I just want to maximize the number of people in my life I can have fun and enjoy life with. Why should I just have one person who can do that for me? (182-187)

The strength of the word "hate" underlines how the expectations of mono-normativity can be stifling. This person questions the idea of having a single partner because it disables the liberty to flirt and date, and especially limits the highly valued activities of having fun and enjoying life. Instead of valuing mono-normativity and the desire to share life with just one other person, the discourse of mono-realism in the utterance is voiced by the individual stating that he or she wants to maximize the number of people in his or her life. The contention is that mono-normativity limits to one, while mono-realism makes space for questioning the single-partner relationship. Mono-realism positions monogamy as unreasonable because it limits individual freedom, especially during interactions with individuals outside of the couple.

**Problematizing "One True Love"**

**"One true love" will meet all needs and desires (discourse of mono-normativity).** In the discourse of mono-normativity, there is an expectation that each person has "one true love". This means that each individual must find and marry a person with whom he or she has fallen in romantic love. The partners are expected to

meet all of each other's social, emotional, and sexual needs and desires. As such, the monogamous romantic relationship is privileged over all other relationships, including friends and family members. It is important to note that per the definition of monogamy, *one* is emphasized: "I believe you should only be with one person" (589-590). This participant elevates the discourse of mono-normativity and being with one person to the state of belief. Similar to the monogamy-equals-commitment tenet, a *belief* heightens the significance of the statement. As a result, the discourse of mono-normativity is structured as a conviction of the only way to conduct romantic relationships.

Additionally, in the discourse of mono-normativity, *true love* is emphasized. The true love can only be one special person, an individual who embodies the idealized romantic relationship built around a couple that remains romantically engaged forever. The following participant voiced the discourse of mono-normativity and the belief in "one true love":

> I happen to believe in the notion of true love. I honestly think that there is only one person out there for each and every individual. I don't think that wasting time with others just for the sake of having fun is fair to you or your temporary partner. In this case both partners will eventually end up leaving each other, and the relationship will have been for no reason. (2004-2009)

Once again, monogamy is elevated to the level of a belief system. The belief system is strengthened by the idea that each person has only one other person who is specifically meant for him or her. As a result, a relationship with anyone who is not "the one" should not take place, as it is a waste of time. Here, relationships for the sake of fun

are devalued because they do not have the same importance as the ideal monogamous romantic relationship.

In the ideal monogamous relationship, partners meet all of each other's needs and desires, specifically sexual and emotional needs and desires. In the initial tenet, monogamous commitment can be defined by sexual and emotional exclusivity. In this tenet, the "one true love" must meet the sexual and emotional needs of the partner. Specifically, the "true love" must be able to fulfill a partner's needs and desires so the partner is not interested in others who might also meet those needs. Furthermore, if the beloved meets all needs and desires, then infidelity is an indicator that he or she is not truly "the one": "I think if someone was in a clear, monogamous relationship and cheated by having sex with someone else, they do not truly love or care for their partner" (1504-1506). To be in love, then, an individual must engage in sexual and emotional exclusivity, and cheating is an indicator that the individual was not truly in love. In the discourse of mono-normativity, monogamous commitment and love are one and the same. If the monogamous commitment is violated, then love in the relationship is also violated. As a result, any relational misstep defying the expectation of monogamy is an indicator that the partner is not the "one true love."

The discourse of mono-normativity includes the idealization that "one true love" will meet all needs and desires. This tenet focuses on the specific elements of "one," "true love" and "will meet all needs and desires." Together, however, each of these elements becomes a litmus test for the monogamous commitment and empowers the discourse of mono-normativity. If one is missing, then the relationship is not valued, as mono-normative expectations are not met.

**Many people can meet needs and desires (discourse of mono-realism).** By problematizing the discourse of mono-normativity, the discourse of mono-realism maintains that "one true love" does not meet all needs and desires. Instead, many people can meet sexual and emotional needs and desires. This discourse acknowledges that people feel sexual and emotional attraction for others outside of the monogamous commitment or couple. Attraction is not indicative of relational failure. Instead, it is positioned as an unforeseen difficulty that is a continuous struggle. Mono-realism allows individuals to engage in monogamous romantic relationships while still feeling individual needs and desires that could be fulfilled outside of the relational dyad, which is a direct contrast to the discourse of mono-normativity. Invoking the discourse of mono-realism, one participant stated:

> Your partner cannot embody, and invade, every part of your life. Therefore, it is necessary to establish certain boundaries with your partner and others to avoid hurting those close to you, or prematurely ending your monogamous relationship in an emotionally traumatic manner. (27-33)

By stating, "Your partner cannot embody, and invade, every part of your life," the participant is acknowledging that a partner cannot be expected to meet all needs and desires. As such, it is important for individuals to create boundaries to protect their loved one(s). This approach to monogamy is very different from the mono-normative understanding that the partner will meet all needs and desires. In mono-realism, needs and desires can be realized without the partner, as guided by boundaries defined in the relationship.

Mono-realism moves monogamous romantic relationships from the ideal to the real, particularly given the understanding that being with one person could be boring:

> I find that the biggest challenge that makes its way into monogamous relationships has to do with boredom or simply the thrill of the catch. Often times I find that guys/girls want something that is unattainable; something new, different, or exciting. (107-111)

Acknowledging that something new and different can be desired upsets the mono-normative notion that one partner meets all needs and desires. Mono-realism makes it okay to want to engage with someone new because others outside of the monogamous couple can also meet needs and desires.

**The Moral Dilemma of Monogamy and Human Nature**

**Monogamous relationships are moral (discourse of mono-normativity).** The discourse of mono-normativity situates monogamy as moral, specifically through the lens of religion. Religion provides a framework for moral conduct at large. It also carries additional weight as an identity that informs belief structures. Many of the survey participants, since their religion dictates monogamy as moral and right, engage in mono-normativity without questioning it or seeing any challenge in monogamous romantic relationships. Christian religious affiliations were mentioned, particularly Roman Catholic and Protestant. For example, participants evoked the discourse of mono-normativity and the role religion plays in their current conceptualization of monogamous romantic relationships: "I was raised Catholic and I have not known anything different than monogamy. I believe it's right to stay loyal" (2038-2039). In this utterance, as a result of being raised Catholic, the participant was never exposed to relational types

beyond monogamy. In the next sentence of this specific utterance, monogamy is conflated with being loyal. Loyalty stems from engaging in monogamous romantic relationships as dictated through religion, where couples are emotionally and sexually exclusive. Another participant echoes the discourse, noting, "I've had a religious upbringing with monogamous parents who instilled my morals and beliefs in what a relationship should be like" (2316-2318). Here, the discourse of mono-normativity is connected to a religious upbringing with monogamous parents. The parents served as purveyors of the discourse by using religion and their own relationship as examples for the child. The child grew up consuming the discourse and has not had the impetus to consider relational types that could vary from his or her religious beliefs.

Furthermore, the discourse of mono-normativity and the tenet that monogamy is religiously moral provides a lens through which individuals can understand monogamy. Monogamy is situated as a factor of religious belief so it is granted more power. For example, a participant noted: "My family members have never had any problems with monogamy as we are all Roman Catholic" (976-977). Religious identity, in this case, allows for monogamous romantic relationships free from difficulty. Religion is then able to reify monogamous ideals because it is not only situated as morally correct, but also as the easy way to engage in romantic relationships.

The connection between religion and monogamy hinges on morals, as monogamy is constructed as the morally correct way to be in relationship. Through religion, the idealization of monogamy is perpetuated. Often this perpetuation is strengthened through upbringing and subsequent familial relationships. If monogamy is dictated as correct and monogamous relationships are the only visible relational type, then the discourse of

mono-normativity is empowered as the centered, normative discourse. Monogamous romantic relationships are not only normative—they are also seen as moral through the lens of religion.

**Monogamy is not human nature (discourse of mono-realism).** Challenging the discourse of mono-normativity, the discourse of mono-realism ascribes to the tenet that monogamy is not human nature. Rather than positioning monogamy as the moral ideal through the religious perspective, individuals who voice this discourse draw upon sexual urges as human nature. For example, one participant spoke about how being attracted to others beyond their monogamous partner is human: "We all notice attractive people. We're human. You don't need to tell your partner every time because that just hurts them unnecessarily" (3066-3068). Attraction, then, is framed as a characteristic of being human. It does not violate a religious moral code, but is instead acceptable.

Specifically with regard to sexual attraction, the discourse of mono-realism even allows for partners to sometimes engage sexually outside of the relational couple. One survey question asked how participants would react if their significant other disclosed attraction to a co-worker (for the complete question, see Appendix B). One participant voiced the mono-realistic discourse:

> I think that being attracted to one person is too constricting. As I mentioned earlier we all have basic urges, most of which are sexual. To not have those takes away from being human…. I would even go so far as to allow my partner to do as they wished with the co-worker to possibly get it out of their system. (2648-2654)

The participant specifically evokes mono-realism by stating that attraction to one partner is restrictive, particularly with regard to human sexual urges. He or she would be willing

to violate the sexual exclusivity expectation of monogamous romantic relationships in order for the partner to satiate human urges.

Another participant echoed the deviation from sexual exclusivity when answering the same question regarding his or her reaction to a significant other stating their attraction to a co-worker: "If they didn't work very close or very often and if I also found her attractive then I might suggest a three-way. And so long as he says he wouldn't act on the attraction without my approval, I would be totally okay with it" (2670-2673). Instead of allowing the partner to engage alone sexually, this participant offered a threesome to diffuse the sexual attraction. Interestingly, the participant noted the importance of acting on the attraction without approval—this would be a violation of the discourse of mono-realism.

"Monogamy is not human nature" is a tenet of mono-realism that allows for human nature and sexual urges to be accepted within monogamous romantic relationships. Here, monogamous commitment is not necessarily defined as sexual exclusivity. Instead, there is an explicit understanding that sexual urges outside of the couple are natural, and in some instances, sexual exclusivity can be sidestepped in order to meet those urges.

**The Struggle Over Jealousy in Monogamy**

**Jealousy is normal in monogamous relationships (discourse of mono-normativity).** Jealousy is an important factor to consider in the discourse of mono-normativity because it is acknowledged as a part of monogamous relationships. Even within the discourse of mono-normativity—which states that "one true love" will meet all

needs and desires—jealousy is a point of contention. It is normalized, as though every relational partner has it.

Participants voiced the tenet that jealousy is normal in monogamous relationships in comments such as: "A challenge in monogamous relationships would be jealousy" (169). In this utterance, monogamy can elicit the feeling of jealousy, and this is seen as a challenge. Another participant stated, "I find monogamy challenging in that it can create jealousy and anxiety about the other partner possibly cheating" (470-471). This participant made sense of how monogamy could elicit jealousy: anxiety regarding infidelity. By engaging in monogamous relationships, individuals who enact the discourse of mono-normativity accept the potential to feel jealous. In fact, jealousy could even be seen as valuable because it is proof that relational partners care that their partner remains sexually and emotionally exclusive.

Jealousy is pervasive and normal in the discursive worldview of mono-normativity. However, it is still seen as a discursive challenge:

> The thing I found most challenging was the issue of jealousy. I am very committed to my boyfriend and want to be with him, but he has jealousy issues that stem from insecurity problems from his past, so it's been a real issue for us. That being said, he's been working really hard to take the jealousy down a few notches. (490-495)

The participant provides a rationale for having feelings of jealousy: insecurity issues from the past. After acknowledging that the jealousy took root because of a past relationship, the participant stated that the boyfriend is working towards limiting how much jealousy he is feeling. The discourse of mono-normativity presupposes that while

jealousy is normal, jealousy within a monogamous relationship is not legitimate because the relational partner should be faithful; therefore, when the emotion is felt (as in the previous exemplar), it is up to the individual feeling jealousy to manage the emotion.

**Jealousy inhibits relationships (discourse of mono-realism).** The idea of jealousy is represented both in the discourse of mono-normativity and the discourse of mono-realism. In the discourse of mono-normativity, jealousy is seen as a challenge to monogamous romantic relationships, but that challenge is normal. The discourse of mono-realism contends that jealousy is a reason for not engaging in romantic relationships, specifically in romantic relationships that are not monogamous. While it might seem that the tenet "jealousy inhibits relationships" is mono-normative, it is important to understand that the discourse of mono-normativity positions jealousy as a normal part of monogamous relationships, while the discourse of mono-realism understands that jealousy can be a reason for not engaging in relationships at large. Nonmonogamous relationships are used as a kind of scapegoat for feelings of jealousy in this data set: the mono-realist discourse is voiced by comparing monogamy to nonmonogamy, and nonmonogamy is demonized through jealousy.

The mono-realistic discourse can be seen in the following exemplar: "I would never engage in an open relationship…because I would be curious as to what he is doing and have jealousy of his other relationship every time I want to spend time with him" (3559-3562). Even though jealousy is an acknowledged factor in monogamous relationships per the discourse of mono-normativity, this participant states that jealousy is one of the reasons that he or she would not engage in an open relationship. So, while

jealousy is understood in the monogamous framework, it is used as leverage for delegitimizing nonmonogamous relationships.

Participants also leveraged the mono-realistic discourse and their perceptions of being a "jealous person" to further establish a rationale for not engaging in any other romantic relationship: "I am a very extremely jealous person, so this open relationship would have gone downhill very quickly" (3292-3293). Being an "extremely jealous" person would inform any relational type, monogamous or open, but the participant above evokes the idea that jealousy would inhibit him or her from engaging in open relationships specifically.

However, through the discourse of mono-realism, there are instances where participants note that they would engage in nonmonogamous relationships if partners did not leverage their feelings of jealousy. For example: "I did once have a nonmonogamous relationship for a few weeks but jealousy between my two partners overrode that. If I was able to find partners that were against that kind of singular relationship I wouldn't be monogamous" (2033-2036). In this instance, the participant is not citing his or her own jealousy as a problem; rather, jealous partners put a halt to nonmonogamous behavior. What results is a kind of partner-enforced monogamy that does not allow for anything other than monogamy, even if it is desired. Partners can leverage jealousy to establish and maintain monogamy. If monogamy must be enforced, then it is not mono-normative—it is mono-realistic.

**Summary of the Discourses**

Two major discourses animate the meaning of monogamy: (1) the discourse of mono-normativity and (2) the discourse of mono-realism. The discourse of mono-

normativity positions monogamy as the correct, natural way to engage in romantic relationships, and this is strengthened by the following tenets: (1) monogamy equals commitment, (2) "one true love" will meet all needs and desires, (3) monogamous relationships are moral, and (4) jealousy is normal in monogamous relationships. The discourse of mono-realism, on the other hand, acknowledges that monogamy is the standard means of conduct for romantic relationships, but it problematizes the monogamous romantic ideal through the tenets of (1) monogamous commitment is unreasonable, (2) many people can meet needs and desires, (3) monogamy is not human nature, (4) jealousy inhibits relationships. Having established the distinguishing factors of the discourses, the next section discusses how the discourse of mono-normativity and the discourse of mono-realism interplay.

# CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPLAY ANALYSIS

The second research question asked, "How does the interplay of competing discourses construct the meaning of monogamy'?" The discourses of mono-normativity and mono-realism developed a high amount of semantic struggle, meaning that discursive competition was clear throughout the data set. Specifically, these discourses engaged in synchronic interplay through negating, countering, and entertaining.

## Synchronic Interplay

Synchronic interplay was the dominant form of interplay in the data set. In this form of interplay, the power struggle between the discourse of mono-normativity and the discourse of mono-realism is apparent in negating, countering, and entertaining.

**Negating**. Negating is when a discourse is acknowledged only to be rejected (Baxter, 2011). The discourse of mono-normativity was privileged and primarily used to negate the discourse of mono-realism. Participants called upon the discourse of mono-realism, only to reject it: "There are always temptations when in a monogamous relationship which can be challenging, but I believe it is important to resist those temptations. Otherwise why are you in the relationship to begin with?" (315-318). While "temptation" is embodied in the discourse of mono-realism, it is only used to reify the discourse of mono-normativity. Temptation is a given in this utterance, yet resisting temptation and committing to the discourse of mono-normativity establish a true relationship. The question in the utterance, "Otherwise why are you in a relationship to

begin with?" reaffirms the discourse of mono-normativity because it situates monogamous relationships as the only legitimate form of romantic relationship.

The discourse of mono-realism was also negated through the following utterance: "I think there are challenges to a monogamous relationship, but there are also so many positives knowing that you are your partner's only other partner" (118-124). While the participant noted the discourse of mono-realism by stating that there are challenges in monogamous relationships, ultimately the participant re-centered mono-normativity by stating that there are many positives to being in a monogamous romantic relationship. The reification of mono-normativity occurred primarily through negating, as participants called upon mono-realism only to marginalize it for their preferred discourse of mono-normativity.

**Countering**. Countering is less polemic than negating (Baxter, 2011). When countering, a discourse is called upon to show that it is a less-worthy alternative to the more favored discourse. Here, the discourses of both mono-normativity and mono-realism were centered through countering, although mono-normativity was more often privileged. The following participant voiced a preference for mono-normativity; however, he or she also noted the significant challenges through the discourse of mono-realism:

> I am currently in a monogamous relationship. I find it challenging to face the social balance of time spent with my girlfriend and the time I'm allowed to spend with others. In a monogamous relationship, I am tied to my girlfriend (which I am happy about), but life has changed significantly since the relationship started. It is difficult to no longer be able to spend time with other female friends when

> going out especially. There is always a sense of distrust whenever one of us is with the opposite sex when going out (the risk and fear of one cheating). (239-247)

In parenthesis, this participant specifically takes time to mention that he or she is happy being tied to a girlfriend. However, the individual then lists elements of mono-realism that inform his or her understanding of the relationship. While not as polemic as negating, this utterance shows countering because the participant is noting the dueling power of the discourses of mono-normativity and mono-realism. There is a sense that the participant is feeling pulled in both directions toward each discourse, but he or she makes it very apparent that mono-normativity allows for happiness amidst the pull.

Countering can also be seen in the tension between the discourse of mono-normativity and the discourse of mono-realism below:

> I was dating my high school boyfriend when I came to college. It was difficult because I felt like I was meeting all these new exciting guys, but I was still tied down by my high school relationship. I also felt like I was growing and changing as a person, but he was staying the same because he was still living at home. I personally think that monogamy is not challenging, until you and your partner are separated, or you otherwise begin to lose interest in them or develop an interest in someone else. (279-286)

The discourse of mono-realism is clearly evoked as the participant notes that he or she felt as though monogamy was difficult when meeting new and exciting males after moving, and also when personal growth created a chasm between the individual and his or her romantic partner. Still, the participant emphasizes that he or she "personally

think(s) that monogamy is not challenging." The speaker then goes on to list ways in which monogamy can be complicated when interest is lost or developed in someone outside of the monogamous partnership. The discourses are clearly competing for power, even though the speaker lends preference to the discourse of mono-normativity.

While the discourse of mono-normativity is privileged in the exemplars above, the discourse of mono-realism is privileged in the following utterance:

> Monogamy is nice but challenging in the fact that my attraction is not limited to one person. I may be attracted to multiple people but only be able to be with one of them because it is "morally" right and that can be frustrating if I am attracted to other people the same amount. (157-161)

The participant notes that "monogamy is nice" and that monogamy has moral implications, but then proceeds to negotiate how attraction to others is frustrating given the restrictions of mono-normativity. The individual centers mono-realism by stating that the feelings of frustration regarding monogamy continue to be a challenge. While this person acknowledged that he or she would likely engage in monogamous relationships, the mono-realist discourse is centered because he or she will not deny attraction to others outside of the monogamous couple.

**Entertaining**. Entertaining "indicate[s] that a given discursive position is but one possibility among alternative discursive positions" (Baxter, 2011, p. 168). When an individual engages in entertaining, he or she calls forth discourses without positioning one as especially dominant. Power, then, becomes neutralized because neither discourse is privileged. In the exemplars provided below, each participant calls upon the discourses

of mono-normativity and mono-realism without situating one as more powerful. For example:

> Having dated my boyfriend for the past four and half years, the hardest thing has been a wandering mind - I've never had sex with anyone else, and sometimes I can't help but wonder what it would be like. I'm madly in love with him, yet there is definitely a temptation and curiosity to hook up with someone else without developing a relationship with the "outsider." (142-147)

This individual does not make a value claim with regard to either of the discourses. Instead, the discourse of mono-normativity is used in the statement, “I am madly in love with him,” then followed with the discourse of mono-realism when speaking about being attracted to others. Once again, this participant still engages in monogamy, but the curiosity and interest in entertaining the idea of interacting sexually with others allows for a balance between the discourses.

Similarly, another participant stated, “I find monogamy to be challenging because you are constantly meeting new people, some of which you may be attracted to. But you constantly have your relational partner on your mind!” (426-429). Here, the discourse of mono-realism is called upon when the participant talks about always meeting new people who could be attractive. However, the discourse of mono-normativity is also apparent in the last sentence, when the participant speaks about the partner always being at the forefront of thought. The exclamation point used in this sentence draws specific attention to the mono-normative expectation that the monogamous relational partner be present, but the idea that mono-realism challenges such expectations is also prevalent in this

utterance. Once again, the discourses are both entertained, without specific centering or marginalization.

**Transformative Interplay**

Transformative interplay also characterized the discourses of mono-normativity and mono-realism as it allowed for power to be suspended. Specifically, the discourses combined and created new meanings of monogamy through discursive hybridity.

**Hybrid.** Hybrid meanings are created when discourses come together to create new meaning instead of engaging in competition. Utterances become non-polemic and create a both/and semantic understanding of the discourses. Hybridity is exemplified in the following exemplar:

> In my current relationship we have agreed to adventure into the world of threesomes in the future if we felt unsatisfied. I feel as though you can still be in a monogamous relationship and be sexually active with other people if the trust is kept. (1399-1402)

The participant's monogamous romantic relationship has become a space for hybrid meaning between the discourses of mono-normativity and mono-realism. The relationship allows for sexual interaction outside of the relational couple, and new meaning is made to define monogamy. Instead of the definitions of monogamy outlined in the discourse of mono-normativity and mono-realism, this participant allows for sexual activity with others through a trusting relationship. New meaning is built through trust, providing the romantic relationship a space to grow. Interestingly, the individual is still defining the relationship as monogamous. The affiliation with the word "monogamy"

implies that there will still be a strong tie within the romantic couple, yet the couple has the power to adjust the meaning of monogamy to help both partners feel satisfied in the relationship.

Another participant notes a similar hybrid, although it is in her current relationship with her long distance partner:

> I'm actually in an open-relationship, but we have rules. We're long-distance while I'm at school and since we can't have sex with each other we're allowed to have sex with other people but we're only allowed to have one-night stands, no contact whatsoever after that like don't even look in their direction if you see them. I came up with this rule so as to avoid any possible emotional connection being made. We're also okay with three-ways or four-ways as long as I am only allowed to give a blowjob to my boyfriend and my boyfriend is only allowed to go down on me. This is so that I can establish that I'm the number one girl and he's the number one guy. (2061-2071)

The rules that are established in this relationship create a framework for the couple to meet their sexual needs, both inside and outside of the relationship. In this particular exemplar, specific sexual acts are ascribed more meaning, rather than all sexual acts. In situations where the couple is interacting with others together, oral sex becomes a distinguishing mark for the couple to maintain its significance. Here, the hybridity is created in the creativity of adjusting sexual boundaries to meet the needs of the couple, rather than being rigid within the framework of either the discourse of mono-normativity or mono-realism.

Through the transformative interplay of the hybrid, both the discourses of mono-normativity and mono-realism are apparent in the utterances. However, the utterances make new meaning from the discourses, creating new rules and boundaries unique to each monogamous romantic relationship. Monogamy is privileged, but not through normative or realist lenses. A new meaning of monogamy is created.

# CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

In this study, the power dynamics of monogamy were explored through the lens of emerging adults, with relational dialectics theory as the theoretical framework (RDT). Two primary discourses animated the meaning of monogamy: the discourse of mono-normativity and the discourse of mono-realism. The discourse of mono-normativity positions monogamous relationships, defined as sexually and emotionally exclusive, as natural. The discourse is empowered through the tenets that: monogamy equals commitment, "one true love" will meet all needs and desires, monogamous relationships are moral, and jealousy is normal in monogamous relationships. In opposition to the discourse of mono-normativity, the discourse of mono-realism is animated by the tenets that: monogamous commitment is unreasonable, many people can meet needs and desires, monogamy is not human nature, and jealousy inhibits relationships. While both discourses are indicative of monogamy, the discourse of mono-realism destabilizes the discourse of mono-normativity by authenticating monogamous romantic relationships that do not define monogamy as sexually and emotionally exclusive. The discourse of mono-realism allows individuals to maintain a sense of self within relationships by establishing that monogamous commitment can be unreasonable because attraction to others is human nature. It also pushes the discourse of mono-normativity beyond a hegemonic acceptance, or an acceptance that sexual and emotional exclusivity are the only way to engage in romantic relationships.

The interplay between the discourses shows that both mono-normativity and mono-realism are salient worldviews for emerging adults. However, there are moments when one or the other discourse is favored. For example, mono-normativity was typically favored when participants employed negating as a strategy of synchronic interplay. Essentially, when an utterance called upon mono-realism, it was typically in order to negate it and position mono-normativity as the privileged discourse.

Through negating, mono-normativity was the preferred discourse of monogamy. Half of the study population defined themselves as being in a monogamous romantic relationship at the time of the survey. The privileging of mono-normativity could reflect the kind of idealized romantic relationship participants desire in their current relationship. When engaging in a monogamous romantic relationship, it makes sense that the idealized mono-normative discourse would be preferred, as it reifies both the initial choice to be in a monogamous romantic relationship and the desire to continue engaging in such a relationship. Favoring the normative discourse reaffirms the initial decision to engage in monogamy because it perpetuates the understanding that romantic relationships should be sexually and emotionally exclusive. If an individual is sexually and emotionally exclusive, affirming the mono-normative discourse subsequently affirms the relationship. Additionally, by perpetuating the mono-normative discourse through granting it power, the discourse is assured power in the future, thus benefiting monogamy over time. As such, privileging the mono-normative discourse reaffirms monogamy as the most ideal form of romantic relationships, while also working to perpetuate the power of the discourse.

Moreover, one quarter of the participant population noted that they had never engaged in a monogamous romantic relationship when the study took place. Individuals who have never experienced a monogamous romantic relationship offer interesting insights into the understanding of discourse because they regurgitate distal utterances without engaging in proximal relationships to inform their understanding. Instead of relying on personal knowledge, individuals rely on cultural scripts and expectations to provide a worldview that informs the discourse. When sexual and emotional exclusivity is deemed "normal" through the mono-normative discourse, then the discourse remains centered for those who have not had any other experience. In short, the idealization of monogamy is privileged for those who rely on distal utterances due to a lack of primary experience in monogamous romantic relationships.

Mono-normativity and mono-realism were equally centered when entertaining was used as a form of synchronic interplay. The pattern of centering one specific discourse functioned through segmentation, which occurs when a discourse is privileged in a certain domain. For example, the discourse of mono-normativity was centered when the participant was with his or her partner. However, the discourse of mono-realism was privileged when the individual was away from the partner. Specifically relating to the emerging adult population, mono-realism attains power in a university setting because living on campus is a primary reason for long-distance relationships. Due to the distance and the influx of new, available potential partners, participants noted that the tenets of mono-normativity were not reasonable, thus favoring the mono-realism discourse. However, when an individual was near his or her partner—typically during school breaks—mono-normativity would once again become the dominant discourse. Proximity

of a relational partner, then, is one dictating force for the marginalization and subsequent empowerment of discourses as they animate monogamy. The meaning becomes fluid, as the discourses that animate monogamy are granted power when they are convenient.

Transformative interplay—hybridity specifically—is of importance in this study. A new meaning of monogamy was found through the mixing of the discourses. Specifically, combining the discourses of mono-normativity and mono-realism granted allowances for sexual exclusivity in monogamous relationships. The discourse of mono-normativity is apparent in the privileging of the couple—rules were built to secure the emotional connection in the monogamous couple bond. However, the discourse of mono-realism helped redefine the monogamous relationship to reflect attraction to others and allowed for individuals outside of the relationship to meet sexual needs and desires. The result was a hybrid that allowed a third person to be invited into the sexual activity of the couple. In some instances, participants noted that the rules built specifically for their relationship allowed for seeking sexual activity outside of the monogamous couple, as long as no emotional connection ensued post-coitus. The relational moments that are neither mono-normative nor mono-realistic transform the discourse of monogamy. The transformation is a hybrid, which was outlined through verbal communication in each couple, showing how the discourses function practically within monogamous romantic relationships.

The hybrid of the discourses of mono-normativity and mono-realism results in a kind of sexual exception in monogamous relationships. The sexual exception, or the allowance of sexual activity in addition to the couple, is supported in *Sex at Dawn* (Ryan & Jethá, 2010). Ryan and Jethá posit that monogamy begets monotony, and monotony in

turn leads to a decline in sexual activity. Through the lens of biological anthropology, they offer various reasons why humans are not naturally sexually monogamous, stating that the value of sex is inflated when the supply is restricted (via monogamy) and the demand is exaggerated (via accessibility of partners through modern technology). The solution, then, is "a reasonable relaxation of moralistic social codes making sexual satisfaction more easily available" (p. 302). *Sex at Dawn* works to reconstruct social expectations with the findings offered in the book, ultimately capturing hybridity of the discourses of mono-normativity and mono-realism circulating in the culture at large. It seems as though this particular hybrid—one where monogamy remains intact through emotive connections while allowing for partners to explore sexual alternatives—is gaining cultural traction.

Arguably, this could be read as an instance when mono-realism is being privileged because a partner is not meeting all needs and desires in a couple. However, in the sexual exception, the discourse of mono-normativity is still present in the utterances of the participants in this study because they frame the sexual liberation through a mono-normative lens: their partner is so emotionally connected that he or she allows for sexual freedoms. Ultimately, the partners are functioning to meet all of each other's needs and desires. Here, the discourses of mono-normativity and mono-realism are both apparent, but a new meaning is created, one of hybridity that changes the meaning in that moment.

The interplay in the discourses that animates the meaning of monogamy signifies a rupture in the current cultural understanding of monogamous relationships. First, monogamy is the centered, dominant expectation for romantic relationships, and due to its hegemonic significance, many individuals never question the expectations for

monogamy (Anderson, 2012). Nevertheless, monogamy has multiple discourses that animate its meaning. As a result, it is culturally imposed as the normal and natural way to engage in relationships, but the individual also enforces it. The individual enforcement can be seen in the discourse of mono-normativity, when participants note that they would not engage in any relationship type that is not strictly monogamous. The rupture also becomes clear when individual expectations regarding monogamy do not align. For example, one individual in a couple might favor the discourse of mono-normativity, while the other favors mono-realism. However, due to the power of monogamy, there are cultural scripts—or discursive templates (Baxter, 2011)—that guide monogamous relationships, so couples engaging in monogamous behavior often do not discuss their expectations (Anderson, 2012). The resulting relationship can face difficulties as the couple moves forward with different understandings and expectations for the relationship. As monogamy becomes more complicated through varied understandings and interpretations of the discourses that animate it, the practical application of monogamy in romantic relationships is further complicated.

The fact that a hegemonic construction such as monogamy can be animated my multiple discourses undermines the dominance of either of the discourses. Operationalizing monogamy within a romantic relationship often does not occur due to the aforementioned discursive templates and hegemonic expectations. If individuals enacting monogamy are not clear on the expectations of their relationship, then the ambiguity can come to act as a definition in and of itself. This ambiguity can be seen in the interplay of the two discourses that animate the meaning of monogamy as they struggle for power and dominance. In the struggle of relational proximity—where mono-

normativity is privileged when the couple is together and mono-realism is privileged when the couple is apart—the enactment of monogamy is contingent on the privileging of a discourse, or on the ambiguity of not specifically defining monogamy. Monogamy can then take on the most convenient form for the individual in a particular moment. The implication here is not that all people manipulate their discourse of monogamy based on convenience. However, based on the interplay of the discourses in this study, some individuals do. The result is a semantic object—monogamy—that can have multiple meanings and can evolve based on what serves the culture or the individual.

Scholars such as Abbot (2010) assert that monogamous romantic relationships are evolving to reflect contemporary understandings of sexuality and human rights through the disestablishment of marriage. Legal rights are being provided to individuals who are not engaging in the traditional institution of marriage and are instead choosing to be recognized as domestic partners. The result is equity of rights across individuals, rather than rights granted to those engaging in a specific relational type. By granting rights to relationships that are not the marital standard, couples have the opportunity also to develop relational standards that defy the expectations of monogamy. The result is the continued evolution of the discourses that animate monogamy as the individuals who enact monogamous relationships continue to change their personal meaning of monogamy.

The extrapolation of monogamy through the identification and interplay of the discourses is significant because it draws attention to monogamy, a construct in communication scholarship that is oft studied but rarely acknowledged, much as heterosexuality was studied until the critical lens was applied (Yep, 2003).

Heterosexuality evades analysis because it is "simultaneously marked as natural and given a category and unmarked as ubiquitous and invisible force permeating all aspects of social life" (Yep, 2003, p. 13). Monogamy is situated like heterosexuality in that it is marked as the natural state for romantic relationships. In fact, it is so normal that it rendered invisible. Even in scholarship that works to critique the heteronormative standard, monogamy is often left out of the analysis (Yep, 2003). The invisibility of monogamy works to other relational types that differ from the monogamous ideal. In the case of monogamy, different relational types are so othered that many people are not even aware that they exist. For example, polyamory—a lifestyle where multiple partners consensually engage in romantic relationships (Sheff, 2011)—is not a term that is widely understood in the U.S. lexicon. According to Yep, othering results in an invisible center that is normalized, resulting in a dominance that maintains its power cyclically:

> Normalization is the process of constructing, establishing, producing, and reproducing a taken-for-granted and all-encompassing standard used to measure goodness, desirability, morality, rationality, superiority, and a host of other dominant cultural values. As such, normalization becomes one of the primary instruments of power in modern society. (Yep, 2003, p. 18)

Monogamy is constructed as normal in cultural discourses, as well as in academic scholarship regarding romantic relationships. The normalization of monogamy reproduces the dominant cultural values, thus reinforcing the power of monogamy.

People who are privileged and discursively engage with discourse also reinforce the power of monogamy. Here, it is important to call attention to the participants of this study, who were predominantly White, female college students. White, female college students compose a dominant population due to race, specifically. Gramsci (1971) contended that the bourgeoisie developed its hegemony by gaining support of the masses,

and hegemonic ideas were sold like propaganda that would benefit all. In contemporary society, the dominant White perspective functions similarly to the bourgeoisie, as Whiteness often dictates the movement of power (Shome, 1999). If the dominant cultural perspective—in this case White, female college students—voices multiple discourses of monogamy, then the meanings of monogamy have the potential to become confused over time. These are the voices that will be heard in the media; these are the people who will reflect normativity. As such, their interpretations of monogamy will be reinforced.

This study intentionally focused on the emerging adult population, and subsequently the White, female college perspective. The intention was to explore the normative of the normative—how the discourses of monogamy are reinforced through hegemony. It is not surprising that White, female college students primarily engage in monogamous romantic relationships. What is surprising is how the discourses that animate the meaning of monogamy offer insight into the rupture of monogamous romantic relationships. In RDT, there is not a direct connection between the bodies that voice a discourse and the power fluctuations of said discourse (Baxter, 2011). In fact, the embodiment of a discourse is not encouraged in a dialogic perspective. However, when a dominant population has the power to develop cultural meanings and voice a preference, that preference carries the weight of power. In this study, the Whiteness of the college women is significant because these individuals collectively are privileged. The rupture in the cultural understanding of monogamy is what future research should continue to explore, as it has the potential to anticipate trends in romantic relationships that manifest discursively.

The population is ultimately a limitation of the study, although the limitation was intentional for this work. Future studies must work to engage populations outside of predominantly White, female college students. Different races, classes, and sexualities all have different perceptions of monogamy, and those differing perceptions have the potential to align with the discourses of mono-normativity and mono-realism. Additionally, it is important intentionally to seek out individuals who are not monogamous. Those who deviate from monogamy will directly engage in competition with the discourses that animate monogamy and offer a distinct perspective on romantic relationship. The survey format is also a limitation of this work. First, it is a limitation because clarification could not be elicited in vague or unintelligible answers. Second, the survey format was also limited to the population at the school where IRB was submitted. Surveys have the potential to be widely distributed; however, the IRB protocol did not allow for distribution outside of the school where the primary researcher submitted. Finally, through an RDT perspective, the survey limited the opportunity to see discursive transformation in affective or emotive moments captured in embodied communication (Suter, Seurer, Webb, Grewe, Koenig-Kellas, 2015). Surveys inhibit communication outside of what is written. As a result, body language, intonation, emotion, and affect are lost. In order to collect comprehensive data, communication must occur face-to-face. However, as previously mentioned, RDT does not encourage the inclusion of information outside of the discursive. As a result, in-person interactions would need to be paired with an additional methodology, such as ethnography, that is inclusive of embodied experiences.

This study rendered monogamy visible through relational dialectics theory. Visibility establishes a foundation upon which additional studies can be situated. First, research that takes into consideration the dominance of monogamy will inform the current understanding of monogamous relationships. For example, there is a wealth of studies on romantic relationships (Attali, 2005; Brandon, 2010; Overall, 1998) and a significant number of books and articles on infidelity in relationships (Duncombe, Harrison, Alan & Marsden, 2004; Hertlein, Wetchler, Piercy, 2005; McAnulty & Brineman, 2007), yet these works do not examine monogamy critically. Instead, they favor monogamy and seek to understand why infidelity occurs, rather than taking a critical look at why monogamy is the expectation (Anderson, 2012).

Second, research can focus on how monogamy informs other relational types, such as open relationships (committed relationships that have specific rules regarding sexual activity outside of the couple, often used as an umbrella term for nonmonogamies of all types), polyamory (individuals seek committed romantic relationships with multiple partners, and honesty is expected among all partners), and swinging (relationships that include sexual activities with additional partners other than the dyad, either as a couple or separate, and can include long- or short-term interactions) (Bergstrand, & Williams, 2000; Gould, 1999; Jamieson, 2004; Lawes, 1999; Sheff, 2011; Worth, Reed & McMillan, 2002).

Due to the hegemonic power of monogamy, nonmonogamy cannot be understood without a basic understanding of the cultural discourses of monogamy. Nonmonogamy is one discursive site that comes in direct opposition to monogamy, even in its name. Titularly, nonmonogamy is what monogamy is not; as such, it is the decentered and

underprivileged. Still, it exists, and it suggests a rich opportunity for future critical research that examines power in romantic relationships.

Third, examining monogamy through the theoretical framework of RDT affords the opportunity to explore monogamy through a critical intercultural perspective. For example, the function of race and economics can be applied to the discourses that animate the meaning of monogamy. This approach would work to understand how monogamy functions in, and potentially contributes to, a culture that privileges wealth and Whiteness. The ideologies of U.S. culture inform the discourses that are privileged and maintain their dominance discursively. Whiteness is one such ideology that permeates the U.S. (Martin & Nakayama, 2010; Shome, 1999). Arguably, monogamy—another dominant social construct—establishes and maintains its power in concert with the ideology of whiteness. As they are both in power, and have hegemonic power at that, logic would contend that whiteness and monogamy cooperate to maintain power. Furthermore, whiteness and economics are inextricably linked (Shome, 1999), and as monogamy is a function of the economics of marital relationships, its power is implicated through the lenses of wealth and race. While RDT is the foundation of understanding the discourses that animate monogamy and power struggle of the discourses, a critical intercultural perspective would develop a clear understanding of how the interplay functions in the greater U.S. ideological systems.

The discourses of mono-normativity and mono-realism animate the meaning of monogamy. While the discourse of mono-normativity is centered as the expectation for monogamous romantic relationships, the discourse of mono-realism is apparent in the struggle for power to make meaning within the relationships. The discursive complexity

of monogamy is apparent in the talk about monogamy and the cultural import of romantic relationships at large. The enactment of monogamy, or the discourse of mono-normativity, is in crisis as represented by the statistics of divorce, infidelity, and sexless relationships. However, the discourse of mono-realism is asserting its power and allowing for individuals to question the tenets of mono-normativity. When the discourse of mono-realism is centered, it opens opportunities for other marginalized relational discourses to surface. Through the decentering of monogamy, other relational types have the potential to gain cultural visibility and add to the rich development of romantic relationships.

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Appendix A

Email Script for Students

Hi Student,

As I mentioned in class, Stephanie Webb—a graduate student at the University of Denver—is seeking participants for her research on perceptions of monogamy To participate, please complete the online survey available here: www.examplewebsite.com. The survey includes instructions, short definitions of key terms, six open-ended questions, and demographic information. Participation in the survey will take approximately 10-20 minutes.

You can earn extra credit by printing out the final page of the survey and turning it in to me. You will be given __ amount of points for your participation. Your name will not be associated with your answers, and you will remain anonymous.

If you have any questions about the research or the survey, please contact Stephanie at Stephanie.Webb@du.edu.

Thank you!

Appendix B

Survey on Perceptions of Monogamy

**Instructions**

Please read the following questions and answer them as fully and descriptively as possible. If at anytime you feel uncomfortable, you can discontinue the survey. Please note that your answers are anonymous. A few key terms are provided below to clarify the survey questions to follow.

**Key Terms**

*Monogamy*: Abstaining from having sex with anyone outside of a romantic couple, whether married or dating.

-Example: A married couple, wherein each partner has only had sexual contact with one another.

*Cheating*: Any behavior that violates the expectations set in a romantic relationship.

-Example: When a partner in a monogamous relationship has sex with someone other than his or her monogamous partner.

*Open relationship*: A committed romantic relationship that has rules and expectations the individuals in the relationship follow. For example, a couple might make a rule that they can engage in threesomes together, but they cannot have sex with someone else individually. An open relationship allows individuals to date others outside of a couple.

-Example: A woman has two long-term, committed male partners who know about each other. The male partners also date outside of their relationship with the woman.

**Questions**

1. If you *have* been involved in a monogamous relationship, what do you find challenging about monogamy? If you *have never* been in a monogamous relationship, what do you think are some challenges in monogamous relationships?
2. What are some of the difficulties you have seen friends or family members face with monogamy?
3. Imagine that you have a monogamous partner and your partner just told you that he/she cheated by having sex with someone else. What, specifically, would you say and/or do? For example, you might want to know how it happened or have other questions regarding the person with whom he/she cheated. Or, You might decide to break up with your partner. If you would break up with your partner, please explain why. There are many ways people respond to such situations. Please be as detailed and clear as possible in your rationale as to why you would react a certain way.
4. How did you personally decide to be monogamous? In other words, please explain your reasoning for engaging in monogamous romantic relationships.
5. Imagine a hypothetical situation. You have a significant other of five years and you are currently living together. You believe that this person is the "the one," and you intend to get married. Your partner approaches you and tells you that he/she is attracted to a co-worker.

How would this confession make you feel? Please describe what this confession would mean to your relationship (e.g. how would you interact moving forward, if you would stay together, etc.…).

6. Now you are presented with another hypothetical situation. You are romantically interested in an individual you have known for an extended period of time, and you finally have the opportunity to go on a date with the individual. You have a really nice first date and subsequent first kiss. On the second date, the individual says he/she has something important he/she needs to tell you: they are in a long-term relationship, but it is an open relationship. The individual would really like to see a relationship develop with you, and is willing to answer any questions you may have.

   Would you continue to engage in an open relationship with this person? What specific questions would you ask?

**Demographic Information:**

What is your age?

What is your Biological Sex?
Male
Female
Intersex
Other

What is your Sexual Orientation?
Heterosexual
Gay/Lesbian
Bisexual
Pansexual
Other

Are you currently in a romantic relationship?
Yes

No

If you are currently in a romantic relationship, what kind of relationship is it?
Monogamous
Open
Other (please describe):
Not currently in a romantic relationship

Ethnicity?
White
Hispanic or Latino
Black or African American
Native American or American Indian
Asian / Pacific Islander
Other

Please click on the link below if you would like to enter your information in order to receive extra credit for class. The information you provide will be stored separately from the survey responses you have provided here. Link Here:
www.examplelink.com